China
Lang.

CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT JARGON?

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That is the question which everyone asks, or is tempted to ask, when they first arrive out here. You scarcely set foot on Chinese soil before you are assailed by a swarm of individuals who jabber most outlandishly at you, and all the while they were supposed to be saying something. From that time on you are a unique individual as long as you stay in China. Unless you have some friend with a tongue that flaps the to tune of your own native language, you are as much alone as a bread-and-water convict, though you may even be jostled about by living human beings. The only remedy for this is to learn that "impossible jargon"—learn to know what they mean when they throw it at you and learn to know how to say what you mean so that they can understand you. That is really the thing I wanted to tell you about—the understanding of "that jargon".

They have a machine here in Peking that does the trick in a surprisingly short time. Now I don't mean by the that, that after one application you can sit down and read the Classics or deliver an intelligible lecture to the natives; but I do mean that in a very short time you realize that it is a real language which these people use as a means of intelligence, and you can even understand some of it and mumble (or spit out) a few of the words yourself. The name of this machine is the North China Union Language School but the natives know it by the name of "Hua Yü Hsüeh Hsiao", which sounds like an unsuccessful attempt to swallow a raw oyster. They claim to teach you Chinese "as she is spoke", and they do.

The system of teaching is a crazy one as everyone thinks when they first come, but when they find how well it works, they turn around and use it on the Chinese in teaching them English. It was certainly funny the first day we went to class. We felt sort of like six-year-olds going up for the first time with our slate and sponge, only we didn't have anything to work with, for that is part of the system. The school is located in a semi-foreign collection of buildings, which they call a *compound* out here, but the foreign part is used almost entirely by the boarding students. The school is in the "semi" or Chinese part. We were shown into one of these queer Chinese rooms and left to the mercy of a Chinese gentleman, who proved to be our teacher, and a clever one, too. He began by pointing to his nose, then at us, and then out the window saying at the same time something that sounded like that old "close-harmony" selection that we used to serenade with back in college. Here is as near as I can spell it:—"Wo-o-o-o-o-? Ni-i-i-i-i-? Ta!" Did you get it? Well, it took us a little while to see what he meant, and after we had looked out the window and at each other several times some one hollered out that he was giving us the personal pronouns. We all laughed and so did he, which made us all feel acquainted. Some tried to repeat what he had said and some to write it down, but that is tabooed for beginners. You have to hark back to the old days and play that you could not write. You are just to listen for a while and then imitate.

That is the system in a nutshell, but in addition to these classes we have alternating periods with a private teacher in a little chicken-coop of a room, just big enough for two to sit facing each other across a little table. That is where the real business is done. Your private teacher takes new and mysterious sounds and sings, acts, gargles, or sneezes them for

your own special benefit so that you can see how they are made. You have probably thought you knew all the sounds the tongue could make, but I'm here to tell you that there are quite a few which the English trained tongue cannot wrap itself around, even with the help of the lips, teeth and a couple of hands thrown in. For instance, take the Chinese word for *man*. A lot of people pronounce it as we do the name of a bird. *wren*, and we spell it with English letters to represent the sound *jen*, but it is neither. It takes a lot of patience and lingual gymnastics to be able to give it in a way that your teacher will approve.

But the language is not the only thing that we learn here. We get a lot of information, which one usually gets by cruel experience or hard reading, by just sitting back in our seats and listening. We have a course of lectures on all sorts of subjects related to the life out here. Men of experience and authority in their professions, come and talk to us about everything from the appreciation of Chinese art, and the Confucian Classics to the mundane subject of sending and receiving merchandise from home, or the most approved way of dodging these pesky microbes that they raise here. Most of these we just take and no one asks us any thing about them, but there are some that we really have to prove that we know something about. We have a course in Chinese history and geography which are pretty thorough. It is marvelous how little you find that you know really about this country. I'll just bet you that, without looking up on a map, you can't locate either Peking or Hankow within a hundred miles of where they ought to be, and either one of them can make your home town look like a crossroads village in comparison. And then history—say, that's one of their chief cards out here. We have a lot of land marks back there that we strain our chests about

but these people don't think a thing begins to figure as old until it has passed its two hundredth birthday.

Mr. Pettus, who is the Director of the school, told me the other day that unless the students of the language get into some direct touch with the Chinese they lose a great deal of good practice in speaking; and also they lose interest in their study, which seems to be to no profit. The school has made excellent provision for this very thing. The students are organized into an association which has charge of all their activities. They have socials, sight-seeing trips, athletics, an active camera club, and endeavor to supply voluntary help to the different missions that are here in Peking. This last service is a great help both to the students and to the Missions. There are various forms of teaching, coaching, and training that the students may enter into before they have acquired a working knowledge of the language. This gives them a direct touch with the Chinese people and also stimulates the desire to learn the language and get into even closer touch with them. It is a great cure for ennui and staleness, besides giving an experience which can be gained in no other place in China. Here are large well organized plants of five of the great Protestant Missions, as well as two Catholic Missions. There are the Y.M. and Y.W.C. A.s, the Salvation Army and other religious and philanthropic forms of work.

I might speak of the legations and diplomatic corps here, the central government with its now-you-see-and-now-you-don't workings, the great Chinese student body—perhaps the largest in all China, and a lot of other things. It is enough to say that this is a great place to be, and that this school with all its activities, is the finest spring-board that one could imagine for a start into the work out here.